

THE TRUTH ABOUT BULGARIA



BY A. T. CHRISTOFF

Is true Freedom but to break
Fetters for our own dear sake,
And, with leathern hearts, forget
That we owe mankind a debt?
No! True Freedom is to share
All the chains our brothers wear,
And, with heart and hand to be
Earnest to make others free!

—James Russell Lowell

The Truth About Bulgaria.

WHO ARE THE BULGARIANS?

"The Bulgarians, a Turanian race, akin to the Tatars, Huns, Petchenegs and Finns, made their appearance on the banks of the Pruth in the latter part of the Seventh century. They were a horde of wild horsemen, fierce and barbarous, practicing polygamy, and governed despotically by their Khans (chiefs) and Boyars or Bolyars (nobles). Their original abode was the tract between the Ural mountains and the Volga, where the Kingdom of Great (or Black) Bulgaria existed down to the Thirteenth century. In 679, under their Khan Asparukh (or Isperikh), they crossed the Danube, and, after subjugating the Slavonic population of Moesia, advanced to the gates of Constantinople and Salonica. * * * The invading horde was not numerous, and during the next two centuries it became gradually merged in the Slavonic population. Like the Franks in Gaul the Bulgars gave their name and a political organization to the more civilized race which they conquered, but adopted its language, customs and local institutions, not a trace of the Ugrian or Finnish element is to be found in the Bulgarian speech. The complete assimilation of a conquering race may be illustrated by many parallels.¹ The Bulgarians, therefore, are that portion of the Slavonic race, which is found till the present time in Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia.

The Christian religion was officially adopted in Bulgaria in 964, through Bysantia. "Morally, Bulgaria was slowly but surely undermined by its intercourse with the Bysantine empire. The nobles and the priesthood were most affected by this sinister influence, and it is noticeable that in the old as in the new Bulgaria the ablest men have usually sprung from the virgin soil of the peasantry."²

The Bulgarians have a very interesting history before their subjugation by the Turks, but its recital is of no importance for our present discussion.

1—Encyclopædia Britanica, 11th Edition, Vol. IV, p. 779.

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Bulgaria's enemies have accused her of atrocities and barbarism. Almost all these accusations emanate from Servian and Greek sources. We know that they are extremely biased. We also know that the Greeks and Servians are not puritanically trained to discriminate between the truth and falsehood. We are told that prisoners of war were very thin and starved when released from Bulgaria, but are the Bulgarian soldiers and her civil population very fat? The press in the allied countries published broadcast the Servian falsehood that the Bulgarians sold several thousand Servian women and girls to the Turks. How were they transported from Servia to Turkey? In what market were they sold? What is the matter with the consuls of the neutral countries at Sofia and Constantinople? Are they asleep on the job? Why did they not inform their governments in regard to this terrible crime? In the small monthly publication, "The Balkan Immigrant," for November, 1918, Miss Mary M. Haskell, a returned missionary, says: "Have readers of the Balkan Immigrant read the tales circulating in the American press which would lead one to suppose Bulgarians to be a cruel and selfish people, not fit to exist? The American missionaries have lived in the country many years and all through the recent wars, we have traveled, we have known people of all parties and nationalities, not only in Bulgaria but in Macedonia also. At times Bulgarian soldiers have paid back their foes in their own coin, but thank God, there have been no systematized cruelties as their enemies fabricate. Time will show this, when unprejudiced men can make tours of investigation and report to the State Department."

SERVIAN CLAIMS IN MACEDONIA.

Before the treaty of Berlin, the Servian national leaders, with the exception of a few extreme Chauvinists, did not claim any portion of Macedonia to be Servian. They knew that the Slavs of that country belonged to the Bulgarian group. Their eyes were turned towards Bosnia and Herzegovina, populated with their brothers by blood, speech and sympathies; and also the sanjak of Novi Bazar, adjoining Bosnia

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and Servia. In their national awakening all the Bulgarians from the Danube to the Ægean, and from the Black Sea to the Albanian Mountains acted in unison. Under Turkish misrule Moesia (Berlin Bulgaria), Thrace (Berlin Eastern Rumelia and the Adrianople Vilayet, clear to the walls of Constantinople) and Macedonia were the home of the United Bulgarian nation. In 1870 all this territory, including Pirot, Nish, Leskovac and Vranya districts, threw off the spiritual yoke of the Phanariotes. The Servians were contented to remain ecclesiastically under the Greek Patriarch. There was no compulsion on the part of anybody to induce the people to join the new church under the Bulgarian Exarch. By their free act the people of Macedonia declared to the world that they are neither Greeks nor Servians. It is a well established fact that ignorant peasants are very reluctant to join a new church, publicly "anathemized" and excommunicated by the head of the church—the Patriarch of Constantinople. Yet the people of Macedonia risked going to a very hot climate in the world to come, rather than be called Greeks in this sinful world. However, there were quite a number of communities which remained with the Phanariotes. The word "Exarchist" meant invariably a Bulgarian, while the word "Patriarchist" meant a Greek, Servian, Vlakh, Albanian or Bulgarian who submitted to the ecclesiastical authority of the Phanariotes.

By the treaty of Berlin (Art. XXV) it was decreed that "The provinces of Bosnia and Herzegovina shall be occupied and administered by Austria-Hungary. The government of Austria-Hungary not desiring to undertake the administration of the Sanjak of Novi Bazar. * * * " This cut the Servians off their lawful sphere of influence and extension towards the sea, and also of the hope of ever uniting the people of their own blood. The sanjak of Novi Bazar was not pre-empted yet, but Austria had already put up the sign "Verboten." It was in the interests of Austria-Hungary to divert the attention of Servia in a different direction. "After the Berlin congress, Austria-Hungary entered into closer relations with King Milan of Servia. He signed the secret treaty of 1881, in

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sciousness of the people themselves. The Servian calculations are generally based on the results of the study of dialects and on the identity of customs; they are therefore largely theoretic and abstract in character. The Greek calculations are even more artificial, since their ethnic standard is the influence exercised by Greek civilization on the urban population, and even the recollections and traces of classical antiquity.”³²

Mr. Brancoff's statistics of Macedonia are the only ones that go into details. He says that Macedonia has 190,000 Greeks, against 1,172,132 Bulgars, not including the Pomaks (Mohammedanized Bulgarians). “The Greek population of Macedonia is confined to the southern regions, yet even here in some districts the Bulgars are in the majority. Thus the Kaza of Lerin (Florina) has 43,488 Bulgars and 110 Greeks; in the Kaza of Ochrid, with 44,432 Bulgars, there are 3,084 Vlakhs, but no Greeks whatever; the Kaza of Vodena has several hundred Gypsies alongside its 31,136 Bulgars, but no Greeks. And, if in the town of Kastoria, the 4,000 Greeks outnumber the Bulgars ten to one, the entire village population is Bulgar, and the Kaza of Kastoria has 57,400 Bulgars against 11,075 Greeks. The city of Salonica with a total population of 130,000, has 20,000 Greeks and 8,000 Bulgars. But while in the city of Salonica the Greeks comprising one-sixth of the population, outnumber the Bulgars more than two to one, in the Kaza of Salonica, outside the city, the Bulgars number 25,000 and the Greeks 17,265.

“East of Salonica the Ægean coast is more Greek than Bulgar in its urban population; but, again, while in the town of Serres there are 2,488 Bulgars against 5105 Greeks, in the Kaza of Serres there are 47,560 Bulgars, against 28,543 Greeks and in the whole sanjak of Serres 259,186 Bulgars to 50,298 Greeks. Indeed, the town of Serres is a Hellenized island in a Bulgarian sea. The town of Drama also has 432 Bulgars, 700 Greeks, and 1,500 Vlakhs but the Kaza of Drama numbers 11,016 Bulgars, 3,890 Greeks and

32—Report International Commission, p. 28, 30.

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RESOLUTION

Of the Macedono-Bulgarian Convention, held at Chicago, Ill., On December 1-6, 1918, for the Freedom of Macedonia and the Unity of the Bulgarian People.

Honorable Woodrow Wilson,
President of the United States of America,
Paris, France.

Mr. President:

We, the undersigned, authorized by the two hundred and one delegates, representing 40,000 Bulgarians from Macedonia, now residing in various places throughout the United States of America, and assembled in convention in Chicago, Illinois, December 1st-5th, 1918, for the purpose of exchanging views about the future fate of our land and people, consider it, before all, our sacred duty to express our profound gratitude to and heart-felt thanks toward the great American people for the kind hospitality shown us from the day of our arrival in this country—an asylum for the oppressed.

Furthermore, we would wish to lay emphasis upon the invaluable services of the American pioneers and missionaries and the splendid influence of their institutions among our people during the past seventy years.

We take the liberty to submit for the earnest consideration of the President of the United States of America, the following facts:

First: We were born, raised and brought up in the various towns and villages of Macedonia, such as Scopie (Uskub), Tetova, Debr, Ochrida, Kostur (Kastoria), Lerin, Vodena, Bitolia (Monastir), Prilep, Veles, Ghevgeli, Dorian, Kukush, Radovish, Shtip, Malleshevo, Kotchane, Kratovo, Koumanovo, Palanka, Demir-Hissar, Seres, Drama, Salonika, Ressen, Tikvesch, Enidje-Vardar and their respective districts, all of which are at present under Greek and Servian yoke. Driven out of our homes by the terrible Turkish misrule and oppression, we found refuge in America, the land of Liberty, where we enjoy freedom and justice. Yet, we cannot forget the land of our fathers where

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we have left our wives and children and our homes—
this being the most sacred duty of every man.

Second: We, who for more than half a century had struggled against the Turks and fought for liberty lived to see our ideals frustrated by the terms of that ignominious treaty of Bukharest (1913), against the injustice of which immediately raised a voice of protest from America. This treaty as an act of violence brought new painful complications in the Balkans and when the great war broke out threw Bulgaria on the side of Germany against Servia, a circumstance that benefited, for the time being, Germany alone.

Third: We are a part of that people whose fathers and forefathers struggled against the yoke of the Greek church and long before the commonwealth of Bulgaria was brought into existence were the founders and builders of our church organization—the Bulgarian Exarchate in Constantinople.

Fourth: We, the Macedonian Bulgarians, living in the United States of America form only a small part of 1,200,000 Bulgarians in Macedonia, who speak nothing but Bulgarian. BUT WE WISH IT TO BE KNOWN THAT OUR WILL IS EXPRESSED HEREIN FREE OF ANY FOREIGN INFLUENCE AND PRESSURE WHATSOEVER.

Fifth: We shall say nothing herein whatever relative to the opinions of scientists, travelers and ethnographers who have ascertained the Bulgarian nationality of the Slavic population of Macedonia, but we take the liberty to declare that it would be absolutely unjust to leave us under Servian and Greek yoke now after the principle of SELF-DETERMINATION AND NATIONAL UNITY has been so solemnly proclaimed.

In view of all the above facts the Convention adopted the following

RESOLUTION:

In the name of the great principles which the President of the United States of America has proclaimed and has made the basis of his world policies the Convention most respectfully begs the President of the United States of America to kindly exercise his

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best efforts at the Peace Conference so that our native land, Macedonia, be included within the future boundaries of our common fatherland—Bulgaria, and prevent from accomplishing a great injustice those who will again try to break up our land and subject us to foreign domination.

The Convention places explicit confidence in President Wilson and trusts that he will gladly defend a just cause, it being one of his sacred purposes to secure freedom for every nation and thus insure a safe and lasting peace for the future generations.

The Convention sincerely believes that the President of the United States of America will take a firm stand in behalf of our freedom and national unity and wishes him success in his great mission.

Respectfully submitted,

REV. DAVID NACKOFF,

President of the Convention.

ALEX. BELIEFF,

Secretary of the Convention.